

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ARCTIC PIONEERS

by

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FIRST PAGE OF THE CHARTER GIVEN BY CHARLES II IN 1670
TO THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY

MY visit this summer to the trading posts on the remote shores of Hudson Bay and the Eastern Arctic regions will set up a landmark in the Hudson's Bay Company's history.

Although the "Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay" have been in existence now for 264 years, a Governor has never yet made a thorough tour of these posts by way of Hudson Strait.

The 2000 tons s.s. *Nascopie*, in which I shall travel from Newfoundland, belongs to the Hudson's Bay Company. It will retrace almost exactly the course of the 50 tons pioneer ketch *Non-such*, which sailed into Hudson Bay from London in September, 1668, with the men who laid the foundations of the Hudson's Bay Company, whose activities have contributed so largely to the establishment of the Dominion of Canada.

SAFER AND QUICKER

That perilous pioneer voyage—with its dangers from uncharted seas and coasts, from possible famine and uncertain drifting ice-floes—will surely come to my mind as the *Nascopie* steams through the Hudson Strait.

Modern navigational aids, such as radio-bearing stations, have combined on the Hudson Bay route to establish during the summer a new, safe, and quicker route between the British Isles and the vast Canadian prairies.

It is impossible fully to grasp the significance of my long voyage unless one understands what the Hudson's Bay organisation means in Canadian history.

The Royal Charter granted by Charles II in 1670 gave power to the Company, as "the true and absolute Lordes and proprietors" of Rupert's Land, as the Hudson's Bay territory was named. No man then dreamed of the extent of these lands. Rupert's Land was called after Prince Rupert, a cousin of Charles II and the first Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Step by step the company took control of its immense territories until, from the original Fort Charles in James Bay—the southernmost post of Hudson Bay—there is now a chain of 232 posts stretching for thousands of miles from the Labrador Atlantic coast to the Pacific, and from the International American boundary to far within the Arctic Circle. Eighteen of the posts are within the Circle itself, and many are so distant that they can be reached only once a year.

As in the past, so to-day, some of the necessary supplies for these outposts are obtained in Europe and are shipped across the Atlantic to Montreal for distribution overland by rail, canoe, and dog-team. These Arctic posts will be within the range of the long distance wireless telephone which is part of the *Nascopie's* equipment, and although I shall not be able to see all my Arctic representatives, there will be satisfaction in being able to talk to them.



PRINCE RUPERT, FIRST GOVERNOR OF
THE COMPANY

As in the olden days, the Company continue to recruit "young adventurers"—fur trade apprentices from the British Isles—to deal in furs with the Indians in exactly the same way as the pioneers did 250 years ago.

TO BARTER FOR FURS

We still speak of "outfits" in our trading terminology—an outfit being the stock of goods carried out every year to be exchanged with the trappers for furs. The furs brought out this year from the Arctic posts will be from Outfit No. 264.

The Hudson's Bay Company owes its origin and growth to the fur trade, and for practical purposes that was the sole interest of the Company for two hundred years. But with the cession of many of the chartered rights of the Company to the Canadian Government in 1870, two new activities were added to the Company's operations. These were the sale of land and the development of retail stores. With the fur trade still continuing, the Company's interests are greater than before.

HAT FASHION

The growth of the fur trade with Canada—and hence the development of the Hudson's Bay Company—came through a new fashion in hats. From about the time of Charles I, large felt hats were the vogue. Hat-makers soon discovered that beaver wool was spiccate—that is, had fine barbs at the ends of the hairs which made them stick to the felt. The European demand for beaver saw the trade with America increase by leaps and bounds.

Even in 1839, when silk hats came into fashion, beaver had become so popular for other purposes that there was no very great fall in the demand.

The theory that Britain owes its Canadian Empire indirectly to the fashion for beaver hats is not an untenable one.

The Redskin was the most important and romantic factor in the growth of the Canadian fur trade, and he, with the Eskimo, fills a noteworthy place to-day. There are still many branches of these races in the vast territories in which we trade and which I am going to visit for the first time.

NEVER A WAR

The manners, thoughts, and customs of the Redskin differ widely according to the locality and have changed enormously during the 260 years in which the natives have been in contact with the Company's service.

The Hudson's Bay Company prides itself on the successful management of the Indian tribes. There has never been an Indian war in Rupert's Land in spite of the remoteness of some of the posts. Without an army and with only a few scattered forts, the Company ruled its huge territory for years in peace, unbroken save for rare and trifling outbreaks.

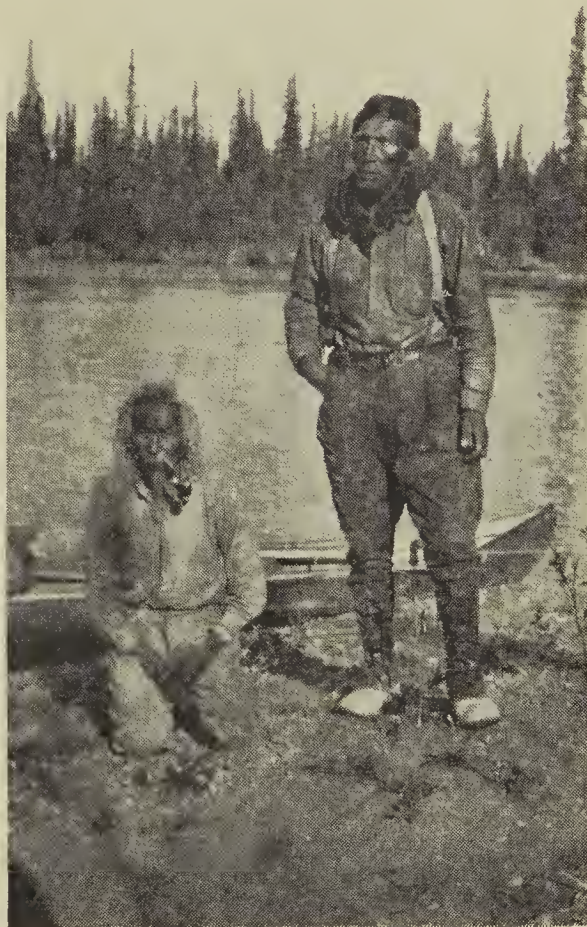
The white men in the Company's service were long ago recognised by the Indians as the representatives of civilisation and of just dealing.

The Indians are now almost entirely dependent upon the Company for most of their needs, and in many districts are becoming settlers rather than hunters.

CENTURIES OF FUR TRADE WITH REDSKINS AND ESKIMOS

The abundant historical data in the archives of the Hudson's Bay House in London give many examples illustrating the simplicity of the Redskins—a simplicity one still meets with even in trading with them to-day. For example, they were at first puzzled about iron and wanted to know where the wood was obtained to make the heads of the axes which the Company bartered for fur.

The Eskimos at first mistook glass for ice and thought it would melt in their mouths. Woollen clothing was a novelty hard for the Indian mind to comprehend, for they asked from what kind of a skin it was made and could not understand that wool was not a skin at all. They believed watches and musical instruments to be living creatures, a musical snuff-box being in their opinion the child of a hand-organ. An early Indian chief, on seeing himself in a mirror for the first time, solemnly declared, "Now I can see into the Spirit World."



STILL BY BARTER

Trade with the Indians for the greater part is still conducted by barter, although of a modified kind. The factor at the Company's post, having assessed the value of a number of the Indian's furs, will hand him a corresponding number of tokens, and these the Indian exchanges in the trading post store for the goods he wants.

So much for the people. The places are just as interesting, and although I shall be travelling in the Hudson Bay area for nearly two months, the territory is so vast and remote that only thirteen trading posts, which are on the coast, will be visited.

The first stage of my journey to the North is a five-day voyage from Montreal to Cartwright, on the east coast of Labrador.

ANCIENT PARTNERSHIP

This post, according to records, was named after one George Cartwright, aide-de-camp to the Marquis of Granby, who entered partnership with Messrs. Thomas Perkins and Jeremiah Lucas, and in 1774 settled at Cartwright "for the purpose of carrying on various branches of business upon the coast of Labrador; and particularly of endeavouring to cultivate a friendly intercourse with the Esquimaux."

The Hudson's Bay Company bought Cartwright in 1873, and it is now one of its most important posts.

Last July General Balbo, the Italian air chief, landed at our post at Cartwright with his fleet of twenty-four seaplanes. By a coincidence the first visitor to that region was the Italian explorer, Sebastian Cabot, in 1498.

Port Burwell, on the North-Eastern shores of Ungava Bay, is a three days' journey from Cartwright in the *Nascopie*.

From Port Burwell my ship's course is still further north to Lake Harbour, on the southern shore of Baffin Island. It was here that the Company's famous reindeer venture had its beginnings in 1921. At the suggestion of Stefansson, the explorer, it was arranged to introduce and preserve reindeer in Baffin Island.

REINDEER IMMIGRANTS

Five hundred and fifty reindeer, accompanied by Lapland herders, their families, and their goods and chattels, were transported in one of the Company's steamers from Norway to Baffin Island in the autumn of 1921. The Dominion Government co-operated in this venture by leasing to the Company the southern half of Baffin Island free of charge for fifteen years.

At the next port of call, Stupart's Bay, I shall see the experimental fox farm started by the Company in 1927. The Company

has established similar preserves for fur-bearing animals in various parts of Canada.

Another experimental fox farm was built at Port Harrison, a place which I shall reach soon after leaving Stupart's Bay and calling at Wolstenholme and Cape Smith.



A MODERN FUR TRADE POST AT WOLSTENHOLME

“ GENERALL RENDEVOUX ”

On August 6, all being well, the *Nascopie* will berth at Charlton, the island in James Bay which was discovered by and named after Thomas James, who wintered in the island in 1631. Charlton is referred to in early correspondence as the “ Generall Rendevoux ” and was used for its safe harbour.

For many years the Company maintained a beaver preserve on Charlton Island, so named after Charles II.

From Charlton, I proceed by aeroplane or schooner further south to Moose Factory, another old post which dates back to 1672, when, according to the records, the Governor and Company resolved to build a fort at “ Mousse bae ” and it was ordained that the ship *Wivenhoe* “ bee sent thither with some bricke and nayles.”

This post has been in continuous operation for the last two hundred years. It is now the terminus of an important railway line.

Rupert's House, my next objective, is on the Rupert River, named after Prince Rupert (1619-1682), Count Palatine of the Rhine, Duke of Bavaria and Cumberland, and Earl of Holderness. Rupert's House has been in continuous operation since 1776, having originally been founded as Fort Charles in 1668.

HENRY HUDSON'S HOUSE

It is stated by Radisson that this post was built on the ruins of a house built by Henry Hudson in 1610.

It is largely owing to the prescience of Prince Rupert that Britain has Canada as part of its Empire to-day.

From Rupert's House I return to Charlton to rejoin the *Nascopie*, which will then set out for Churchill.

This post, which was settled in 1688, is named after John Churchill—afterwards first Duke of Marlborough—who was the third Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. There is evidence of a settlement here by a party of Danes under one Jens Munck who, according to a contemporary correspondent, had wintered there in 1619 on a point which contains "so much compass of Ground as the Royall Exchange Stands Upon."

WAR CENTRE

The fort, formerly called Prince of Wales Fort, was, like many others, actively concerned in the wars with the French, and was on one occasion totally destroyed.

At Churchill I shall leave the *Nascopie* and, taking the new Hudson Bay railway, proceed to Winnipeg, visiting some of the Company's establishments *en route*.

On my return to Britain in September I shall have completed as Governor, since 1931, my fourth Canadian trip, and hope to have gained from it an even greater knowledge of that wonderful Dominion.



S.S. "NASCOPIE"